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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Middle East Children as Victims of Armed Conflict

The alarming continuation of armed conflicts in the Middle East region, especially Iraq and Syria, has led to the violation of all human rights of civilians, especially the vulnerable groups including women and children.

Protection of children during armed conflicts is of vital importance because on the one hand, they suffer the most, due to their physical weakness and dependency on adults' protection. On the other hand, their suffering leave lasting negative effects on their mind and their bodies. In the case of abducted children, serious worries are expressed about their fate, such as the girl children abducted by IS in Iraq and Syria, or the others, kidnapped by the terrorist group in the region.

During armed conflicts children are subjected to different forms of violence, including, being victims of violence and atrocity crimes by the enemy military or being recruited as child soldiers and getting directly involved in the armed conflict.

As victims of violence, children suffer from a number of the atrocities such as unlawful killing, sexual violence, enslavement, rape, forced marriages, displacement and abduction, which have unfortunately caused the world to witness a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in in Iraq and Syria, the crimes committed by IS and associated terrorist groups.

In addition to suffering from such atrocities, armed conflict not only continued to lead to violations of children's rights to life and physical integrity, but also to deprive them of their basic economic, social and cultural rights. They cannot go to school, have limited access to food, doctors, medical care and limited access to justice. They are made homeless and are separated from their parents.

In Iraq conflicted zones, children suffer from atrocities such as forced conversion of their religion, forced marriage and die from thirst or hunger. In august, 2014, four Christian children who refused to convert their religion and say the words IS would dictate, got beheaded by the terrorists[1]. Also, according to the released news, girls from Iraq's Yazidi minority have been raped, sold into sexual slavery and abused by IS[2]. In August 2014, about 40,000 minority members[3]remain trapped on Mount Sinjar which became a graveyard for their children. According to a UNICEF representative[4]their children who were completely cut off, suffering from hunger and thirst died on the mountain and on the roads.

Those who have survived and managed to escape the terrorist attacks, are suffering from poor living conditions in camps, while the cold of the winter exacerbate the hardship.

Unfortunately, violence against children is not limited to Iraq and Syria region, it is witnessed in other parts of the world, for example, during the 50-day conflict between Israel and Palestinian militants in 2014 more than 500 Palestinian children lost their lives[5], and among the 11000[6] injured civilians there were many children.

Another form of violation of children's rights during armed conflicts is recruiting them as soldiers. Many child soldiers end up in detention where they suffer from various forms of violence, such as torture, summary or arbitrary execution or receive imprisonment sentences without due process of law.

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[1] www.dailymail.co.uk/.../Four-young-Christians-brutally-beheade...

[2] www.nbcnews.com/.../isis-raped-sold-yazidi-women-girls... ; http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/isis-raped-sold-yazidi-women-girls-sex-report-n273716

[3] http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/40000-iraqis-stranded-mountain-isis-death-threat

[4] http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraqi-yazidis-stranded-on-isolated-mountaintop-begin-to-die-of-thirst/2014/08/05/57cca985-3396-41bd-8163- 7a52e5e72064_story.html

[5] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/13680-unicef-israel-killed-500-children-in-gaza

[6] http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/152139/palestinian-fisherman-injured-israeli-forces-enter-gaza

This is while, according to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, no child under 18 should be allowed to participate in armed hostilities.

Many children are abducted and beaten into submission, others join military groups because of having no other options. They want to escape poverty, defend their communities or fulfil a feeling of revenge. Children make better soldiers as they are manipulated more easily than adults and can be indoctrinated to perform crimes and atrocities without asking questions. However, being involved in armed conflicts, leave negative impacts on their lives. Their needs as children are forgotten and they are blamed by their communities for getting involved in atrocities.

In Syria conflict, children are increasingly used in armed combat roles, dragged into the conflict and exposed to extreme violence at an alarming rate.Over 5 million children have been impacted by the Syrian conflict[7]. According to Laurent Chapuis, UNICEF's regional child protection adviser for the Middle East and North Africa, children have been used as combatants, human shields, messengers, spies, guards and porters, sometimes manage checkpoints and maintain weapons. Underage Syrian girls have been forced to wed foreign fighters.

In some cases fathers bring children to join the IS. They attend schools in which they learn how to kill, behead or become suicide bombers. While, in some other cases, ISIS militants have altered local school curricula to fit their strict ideology and recruited boys for training camps and religious camps without the consent of their parents. The ISIS have been able to use social media and video propaganda to influence foreigners, including boys and girls, to follow their cause. IS boasts about its capacity to recruit child soldiers and is proud about it.

Children's involvement in armed conflicts, has devastating long lasting effects on their lives, and in most cases child soldiers need to attend rehabilitation programs. In addition, it is very difficult to prosecute child soldiers for war crimes and crimes against humanity given their dual status as both victims and perpetrators, so governments are urged to make attempts to prevent any sort of child involvements in conflicts, specially recruitment of children as soldiers.

Considering the fact that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child regards recruitment of child soldiers as war crime, and the notorious effects of war on child victims, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) offers the following recommendations to ensure more child protections in conflicted regions:

States are recommended to criminalize under-age recruitment, and prosecute and investigate perpetrators.

States, NGOs, the elite, including the religious leaders, the civil society actors and schools are urged to raise awareness about child protection at community level, describing the bitter consequences of recruiting child soldiers.

States and the civil society are urged to address the root causes of 'voluntary' recruitment, such as poverty, social grievances and survival, and provide children with alternatives to enrolment.

After the conflict, States are encouraged to run reintegration programs for child soldiers in order to integrate them into their families or community.

States are encouraged to provide alternative accountability mechanisms to prosecution and trial in a criminal court for former child soldiers and ensure that where a child is tried in a court, juvenile justice standards apply.

States are reminded of the fact that children must be among the first to receive protection and relief.
Children must be respected and protected against any form of indecent and assault.

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[7]http://www.worldvision.org/sites/default/files/Syria-Crisis_Education-Interrupted_Dec-2013.pdf
http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.7998857/k.D075/Syria.htm?nsource=weolpsrc4v12